

# THE END

SERIES: KNOWING THE GOD OF  
JUSTICE AND HOPE



Catalog No. 20170924  
Ezekiel 7:1-9  
3rd Message  
Scott Grant  
September 24, 2017

*Ezekiel 7:1-9*

Adolf Eichmann was the mastermind behind the Nazi concentration camps. He was captured in Argentina in 1960 and put on trial in Israel. Yehiel Dinur, a Holocaust survivor, spent two years in Auschwitz. Having been called to testify in the trial, Dinur saw Eichmann, sitting in the dock behind bulletproof glass, and began to sob. He then fainted, collapsing in a heap on the floor as the presiding judicial officer pounded his gavel for order.

What do you do when you come face to face with evil? What do you think God does?

In Ezekiel 1-3, we're left with the impression that bad news is coming. Just how bad is it? Ezekiel, beginning in Chapter 4, answers the question. The news for Israel is bad—really bad. Ezekiel 4-24 features a series of oracles of judgment against Israel. Ezekiel illustrates God's coming judgment in a series of sign acts in Ezekiel 4-5. For example, the Lord instructs Ezekiel to take a brick, inscribe the name "Jerusalem" on it, and lay siege against it as a sign to Israel. Our focus, in the section that spans Ezekiel 4-7, is Ezekiel 7:1-9, where the prophet speaks straightforwardly about the judgment he's been illustrating.

Our section features a clear two-part structure in which the second part echoes the first part.

## Part 1

**Ezekiel 7:1-4:**

**The word of the Lord came to me: 2 "And you, O son of man, thus says the Lord God to the land of Israel: An end! The end has come upon the four corners of the land. 3 Now the end is upon you, and I will send my anger upon you; I will judge you according to your ways, and I will punish you for all your abominations. 4 And my eye will not spare you, nor will I have pity, but I will punish you for your ways, while your abominations are in your midst. Then you will know that I am the Lord.**

What "end" is the Lord talking about? It's the end of the people of Israel in the land of Palestine. The "four corners" of the land represent the land in its totality, as if a sheet were spread out over it (Deuteronomy 22:12, Job 38:13).

Why has the end come? The Lord, in sending his anger upon the land of Israel, is judging the people of Israel for their "ways" and "abominations." These ways and abominations concern idolatry, which expresses itself in all manner of evil (Ezekiel 7:20, 23).

The Lord told the people of Israel that if they forsook his covenant with them and persisted in idolatry, he would remove them from the land (Deuteronomy 29:28). The land, which the Israelites have occupied as a gift from the Lord, has become polluted by their idolatry to the extent that it will "vomit" the Israelites out, just like it vomited out the pagans before them (Leviticus 18:28, 20:22).

Inasmuch as the Lord will punish the Israelites for their ways while their abominations are in their midst, the people will have no excuse. They will be caught red-handed, so to speak. They'll be getting what they deserve. The Lord will judge them "according to" their ways. The fate of the Israelites is the outworking of their ways and abominations. Moreover, their ways and abominations are such that the Lord will not spare them: he will show no mercy.

What then? "Then you will know that I am Lord." This phrase appears in the book of Ezekiel more than seventy times. When Ezekiel's prophecies are fulfilled, the people of Israel will know that the one who is speaking through Ezekiel is in fact the Lord, Yahweh, the God of Israel. Yes, it is their God who is judging them in this way. Moreover, they are supposed to know God through his unsparing, merciless judgment of them, which will bring an end to their existence in the land.

## Naïve view of humanity

Does God really get angry? Does he get this angry? Does he judge people in this way? The answer, according to the Ezekiel, not to mention much of the rest of both

testaments, is yes. If such a view of God is unpalatable, then perhaps we should consider our view of humanity. There is a view, popular today, that humans are mostly good, even perfectible, especially if they can be correctly educated. It's understandable why those who hold this view would find Ezekiel's view of God unpalatable, even offensive, for if humanity is only in need of a few tweaks, then God has very little to be angry about.

Neville Chamberlain was prime minister of the United Kingdom leading up to World War II. Reared as a Unitarian and believing in the essential goodness of humanity, he is best known for his "appeasement" policy in relationship to Nazi Germany. He signed the "Munich Agreement" with Adolf Hitler in 1938, conceding part of Czechoslovakia to Germany, and returned waving a piece of paper and proclaiming, "Peace for our time." Less than a year later, Hitler invaded Poland, and the UK declared war on Germany. It seems that Chamberlain had a flawed—even naïve—view of humanity, and that God had very much to get angry about.

Verses 5-9 echo verses 1-4, both in content and structure. When you see such parallelism in the Scriptures, you want to look for significant differences. What's different in Part 2?

## Part 2

**Ezekiel 7:5-9:**

**"Thus says the Lord God: Disaster after disaster! Behold, it comes. 6 An end has come; the end has come; it has awakened against you. Behold, it comes. 7 Your doom has come to you, O inhabitant of the land. The time has come; the day is near, a day of tumult, and not of joyful shouting on the mountains. 8 Now I will soon pour out my wrath upon you, and spend my anger against you, and judge you according to your ways, and I will punish you for all your abominations. 9 And my eye will not spare, nor will I have pity. I will punish you according to your ways, while your abominations are in your midst. Then you will know that I am the Lord, who strikes.**

The "end" is now equated with "disaster after disaster," literally "disaster, unheard of disaster." The end is "awakened" against Israel, as if it's been sleeping, but now, in view of Israel's sin, it gets out of bed, so to speak. Israel deserved this a long time ago, but the Lord has been exceedingly patient.

Verse 7 represents a significant expansion upon Part 1. The end now becomes "doom," "the time," and "the day," further defined as a day of "tumult," which is the effect of war (2 Chronicles 15:5). Tumult is in contrast to "joyful shouting on the mountains," which was connected with harvest festivals involving the worship of other gods.

In Part 1, the Lord will "send" his "anger"; in Part 2, he will "pour out" his "wrath" and "spend" his anger," images that convey totality. If something is poured out, if something is spent, there's nothing left.

Finally, Part 2, like Part 1, concludes with the refrain, "Then you will know that I am the Lord." However, in Part 2, the Lord is identified as one "who strikes." The Lord has struck the enemies of Israel, the exceedingly wicked pagan nations; now he promises to strike his own people!

## Accurate view of humanity

Humans have rebelled against God, worshipped other gods, and are guilty of all manner of social evil. If we hold to such a view of humanity, then we will agree with Ezekiel's view of God and realize that, indeed, he has very much to get angry about. God has every right to get angry. God must get angry.

Neville Chamberlain's successor as prime minister, Winston Churchill, harbored no illusions that Adolf Hitler could be appeased. Churchill called Hitler "that evil man" and "the mainspring of evil."

This summer I watched the movie *Dunkirk*, an awesome piece of filmmaking. After the trapped British troops were evacuated from Dunkirk, France, near the beginning of the war, Churchill inspired the nation with these words, addressed to the House of Commons, on June 4, 1940:

*Even though large tracts of Europe and many old and famous States have fallen or may fall into the grip of the Gestapo and all the odious apparatus of Nazi rule, we shall not flag or fail. We shall go on to the end, we shall fight in France, we shall fight on the seas and oceans, we shall fight with growing confidence and growing strength in the air, we shall defend our Island, whatever the cost may be, we shall fight on the beaches, we shall fight on the landing grounds, we shall fight in the fields and in the streets, we shall fight in the hills; we shall never surrender . . .*

As President Kennedy observed, Winston Churchill “mobilized the English language and sent it into battle.”

Ezekiel says that we can know God in that God judges evil. Indeed, you can know people, at least in part, when they are angry. When they get angry, you know what offends them; you know, at least to some degree, what they value. Idolatry, and all the social evils that flow from it, makes God angry. God’s anger, in contrast to human anger, is righteous: pure and holy and beautiful.

## Evil is in us

Biblically, sin is not simply doing bad things. Bad things come from someplace, right? They are wrought in the human heart. Scholar Richard Lovelace comments: “In its biblical definition, sin cannot be limited to isolated instances or patterns of wrongdoing. It is something much more akin to the psychological term complex: an organic network of compulsive attitudes, beliefs and behavior deeply rooted in our alienation from God.”<sup>1</sup>

Some twenty-two years after he collapsed in the courtroom, Yehiel Dinur appeared on the television news show 60 Minutes. Mike Wallace asked him about his reaction to seeing Eichmann. Was he overcome by fear? Hatred? Post-traumatic stress? No. Dinur told Wallace that when he saw Eichmann, he didn’t see a godlike army officer who sent millions to their death. He didn’t see a monster. Instead, he saw what appeared to him to be an ordinary man.

Why did Dinur collapse in a heap? “I was afraid about myself,” he told Wallace. “I saw that I am capable of doing this. I am . . . exactly like he.”

Wallace opened the segment with these words: “How is it possible . . . for a man to act as Eichmann acted? Was he a monster? A madman? Or was he perhaps something even more terrifying: was he normal?” After interviewing Dinur, Wallace concluded with this chilling observation: “Eichmann is in all of us.”

An editor once asked G.K. Chesterton, the brilliant British writer from the first half of the twentieth century, to write a magazine story on “What’s Wrong With the Universe?” A lot could be said, couldn’t it? What’s wrong? Everything’s wrong! Chesterton, an upstanding Catholic, responded to his editor with only one sentence that only took two words: “I am.”<sup>2</sup>

Envy, pride, resentment, demandingness, indifference, and idolatry reside in us. Eichmann is in all of us. What’s wrong with the universe? I am.

Where does that leave us?

## The wrath of God

If Ezekiel envisioned the end of Israel in the land, the apostle Paul envisioned the end of the age: “Then comes the end, when he [Christ] delivers the kingdom to God the Father after destroying every rule and every authority and power. For he must reign until he has put all his enemies under his feet” (1 Corinthians 15:24-25).

Paul, like Ezekiel, spoke of both of the patience and the coming wrath of God: “Or do you presume on the riches of his kindness and forbearance and patience, not knowing that God’s kindness is meant to lead you to repentance? But because of your hard and impenitent heart you are storing up wrath for yourself on the day of wrath when God’s righteous judgment will be revealed” (Romans 2:4-5).

Ezekiel said that the Lord would punish the people of Israel while their sins were in their midst so that the people would have no excuse. Likewise, Paul says: “For his [God’s] invisible attributes, namely, his eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly perceived, ever since the creation of the world, in the things that have been made. So they are without excuse” (Romans 1:20).

For some, the end will be a disaster, an unheard of disaster, a day of tumult and not of joyful shouting. Listen to the Lord, who tells the apostle John about the end: “But as for the cowardly, the faithless, the detestable, as for murderers, the sexually immoral, sorcerers, idolaters, and all liars, their portion will be in the lake that burns with fire and sulfur, which is the second death” (Revelation 21:8).

Then what? “Then you will know that I am the Lord.” “Then you will know that I am the Lord, who strikes.” He strikes. Strikes whom? In Ezekiel, he strikes the Israelites, his people.

## The love of God

Another prophet, Isaiah, spoke not of the people of Israel being struck but of an individual Israelite:

Surely he has borne our griefs  
and carried our sorrows;  
yet we esteemed him stricken,  
smitten by God, and afflicted.  
But he was pierced for our transgressions;  
he was crushed for our iniquities;  
upon him was the chastisement that brought us peace,  
and with his wounds we are healed.  
All we like sheep have gone astray;  
we have turned—every one—to his own way;  
and the LORD has laid on him  
the iniquity of us all. (Isaiah 53:4-6)

The word translated “stricken” in Isaiah is the same word that is translated “strikes” in Ezekiel. Who does the Lord strike? In Isaiah, he strikes the one we call the Suffering Servant, the one whom the New Testament declares to be the Messiah, the Son of God, Jesus of Nazareth.

Mark tells us what happened when Jesus was arrested: “And some began to spit on him and to cover his face and to strike him, saying to him, ‘Prophesy!’ And the guards received him with blows.” (Mark 14:65). And when he appeared before the Roman governor: “So Pilate, wishing to satisfy the crowd, released for them Barabbas, and having scourged Jesus, he delivered him to be crucified” (Mark 15:15). And he was handed over to the Roman soldiers: “And they were striking his head with a reed and spitting on him and kneeling down in homage to him” (Mark 15:19).

said that the Lord would soon “pour out” his wrath upon his people. Jesus, in the upper room, took a cup, gave thanks, and spoke to his disciples about something else being poured out: “Drink of it, all of you, for this is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins” (Matthew 26:27-28).

Ezekiel said that the eye of God would not “spare.” Paul, on the other hand, says this of God: “He who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all, how will he not also with him graciously give us all things?” (Romans 8:32)

Therefore, instead of being objects of God’s wrath, as in Ezekiel, the people of God, those who have now given their allegiance to Christ, are saved from God’s wrath:

For a while we were still weak, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly. For one will scarcely die for a righteous person—though perhaps for a good person one would dare even to die—but God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. Since, therefore, we have now been justified by his blood, much more shall we be saved by him from the wrath of God. For if while we were enemies we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son, much more, now that we are reconciled, shall we be saved by his life. More than that, we also rejoice in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received reconciliation (Romans 5:6-11).

If Ezekiel could say that God would show no mercy, Paul could say this: “For God has consigned all to disobedience, that he may have mercy on all” (Romans 11:32).

If Ezekiel envisioned the end of “joyful shouting on the mountains” during pagan feasts, the apostle John anticipated a different kind of feast:

Then I heard what seemed to be the voice of a great multitude, like the roar of many waters and like the sound of mighty peals of thunder, crying out,

“Hallelujah!

For the Lord our God  
the Almighty reigns.

Let us rejoice and exult  
and give him the glory,  
for the marriage of the Lamb has come,  
and his Bride has made herself ready . . .

(Revelation 19:6-7)

Ezekiel says that we can know God in that God, in his wrath, judges evil. A host of biblical witnesses also says that we can know God in that God, in his love, sent his Son to die for the evil that is in us. If we know God in his wrath, we will be ready to know God in his love, and we will be all the more thankful, even awestruck, for his love. The bad news is really bad. Because the bad news is so bad, the good news is really, really good.

## **Then you will know**

Eichmann is in all of us. What’s wrong with the universe? I am.

Yes: “All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned—every one—to his own way.”

But: “The LORD has laid on him the iniquity of us all.” “And with his wounds we are healed.”

Then what? “Then you will know that I am the Lord.”

## Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> Lovelace, Richard F. *Dynamics of Spiritual Life*. InterVarsity Christian Fellowship, 1979. 88.

<sup>2</sup> Willimon, William H. *The Collected Sermons of William H. Willimon*. Westminster John Knox Press, 2010. 176.